

**Indicator 49. Extent to Which the Legal Framework (Laws, Regulations, Guidelines) Supports the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forests, Including the Extent to Which It—Provides for Periodic Forest-Related Planning, Assessment, and Policy Review That Recognizes the Range of Forest Values, Including Coordination with Relevant Sectors**

**What Is the Indicator and Why Is It Important?**

The sustainability of forests is dependent on society's ability to comprehensively evaluate trends and conditions in diverse sectors and to subsequently take responsive actions that will ensure the sustained use, management, and protection of forest resources and the communities that are dependent upon them. These actions are typically predicated on well-focused and technically sound plans, assessments, and policy reviews that are sensitive to a range of forest values and are coordinated with a variety of forest-related sectors.

**What Does the Indicator Show?**

Forestry and related government agencies at all levels in the United States have a long legal history requiring plans, assessments, and periodic reviews of policies and programs. In general, ample statutory and administrative authority is in place to conduct these activities, although the intensity with which they are carried out varies widely within and among different levels of government. The plans and assessments resulting from such authorities are not always comprehensive; they often focus on a single resource sector within forests. In only a limited number of cases does evidence exist of concerted and effective efforts to coordinate plans. Whether existing legal capacity is actually being translated into meaningful plans and their subsequent implementation is largely unknown.

Federal legal capacity requiring planning for the use, management, and protection of forests has existed for many years, with early legal requirements most often requiring Federal agencies to define broad strategic direction for agency activities. Federal statutes requiring plans focused on Federal public forests are nearly split in character between requirements for the

preparation of strategic program plans and land-use and management plans. Federal agency authority for carrying out assessments is set forth by statutes that call for continuous assessments, periodic assessments at specified intervals, or intermittent assessments needed to address important issues regarding resource use and management. Assessments are frequently conducted in concert with the development of strategic program plans or land-use and management plans.

State governments also engage in forest planning and assessment activities, although responsibility for such activities has increasingly become dispersed across more and different types of State agencies (for example, agencies with broad environmental responsibilities). Over the last 20 years, nearly all States have prepared a statewide forest resource plan; many States have actively updated their forest plans. Legal authority to initiate planning processes exists in all States, although such processes and the resulting plans vary considerably in strength and sophistication. State legal authority to engage in forest resource planning often parallels Federal statutory authority for planning. Although never comprehensively defined, local and regional governments are also known to engage in planning, assessment, and policy and program review activities.

Planning activities of the private sector are motivated by self-interest or often are prodded by requirements for participating in some government programs (for example, fiscal incentive programs). In some cases (for example, State forest practice laws), State law may require private concerns to prepare for government review or approval of a timber harvesting plan. Because of proprietary concerns, the planning and related activities of industrial forestry concerns are not commonly known.